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ABSTRACT

The inequality of opportunity that sometimes results from educational reform may not be an artifact or an aberration but may be the intended result of most programs. Although the ostensible goal of most educational reform is equal opportunity, very few programs achieve this goal. It is possible that the real goal of educational reform is continued control by the elite rather than the enfranchisement of the disenfranchised. Evidence lies in the fact that many educational reforms are unsuccessful or have useless goals. For instance, competency testing programs have not been shown to enhance academic skills, and tests for many such programs either have absurdly low standards or cancel hope of a diploma for the disadvantaged. Many maintain that functional literacy examinations are biased against the black and the poor. It appears too that compensatory education funds reward those who do not learn. Critics maintain that government agencies have the opportunity to provide testing guidelines above politics but do not do so. Finally, although a strong cabinet-level education department would benefit the disadvantaged, many critics are against this reform. All these so-called "artifacts" suggest that some educational programs may be designed to maintain current societal relationships. (Author/JM)

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THE ARTIFACTS OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM: EXPLAINING THE UNEXPECTED

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PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

To understand the existing artifacts of educational reform and to be able to predict future artifacts of educational reform we must first understand the goals of educational reform. Artifacts are the observable achievements of goals. When we observe an unexpected artifact of educational reform we sometimes feel it is an aberration (especially if it is undesireable). We feel this way because we have not recognized as a goal of educational reform the goal represented by the artifact. This paper attempts to describe the real goals of educational reform through an analogy to the goals of national constitutions and through an analysis of currently observable artifacts.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of educational reform has been stated many times in preambles to educational reform bills, administrative rules, scholarly papers and empassioned speeches. A typical statement of the goal is:

> The primary function of education in a pluralistic society is not to solve social problems which exist within a white-centered society containing other races; rather the function of education in a democracy is to provide equal educational opportunities for all students to develop their intellectual capacities to the greatest possible extent. Educators are devoted to the development of quality educational programs for all persons, enabling them ultimately to solve their own problems and those of society (Bash and Long, p. 7).

The idea is a popular one. In fact, at least 36 states reported that testing is used to identify students in need of special attention in order to make their opportunity for education equal to the opportunity of the larger group (Pipho, 1979).

Support for the popular notion that the goal of educational reform is equal education opportunity can be seen in the dissatisfaction with current educational reforms expressed by people concerned about the welfare of disadvantaged students. The most dramatic indication of dissatisfaction currently, is the federal class action suit brought by minority students in Florida which seeks to end the Florida functional literacy program as discriminatory.

If society is committed to providing equal educational opportunity, why are the reforms so slow? Why are the disadvantaged perceiving a lack of good faith on the part of those who administer educational reform? Is it simply the pace of the ponderous bureaucracy moving with "deliberate speed" or is something else at work? Is it possible that the true goal of educational reform is something other than equal educational opportunity? Could it be just the opposite? That rather than educational reform being a system for assisting the disadvantaged to take their places among the elite, it is in fact, a sop. The effect being to provide a sense of something being done when, in fact, little change in social position is possible or desired. If this is true, can we discover evidence of its truth? If we look at complaints about, and dissatisfactions with educational reform we see "aberrations", and we think these result from some problem in the process of implementing educational reform rather than from our misinterpretation of the real goals of educational reform. Perhaps it is more productive to look at the aberrations as natural (expected) artifacts of a process designed to achieve some set of goals other than equal educational opportunity.

Let us examine the possibility that the real goals of educational reform are not equal educational opportunity, but are the continued control by the elite. To do so, we will first show that there is great similarity between the language of educational reform rules and the language of constitutions, which are

documents of control. Secondly, we will examine the construct that educational reform is designed to protect the holdings of the elite by examining the current artifacts of educational reform to see if, rather than being aberrations, they are to be expected given the truth of the construct.

CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES GOVERNING EDUCATION

In a complete examination of national constitutions around the world, Duchacek (1973) identified a common set of individual rights. In describing these rights, he indicated the ways in which individuals are limited in their practice of rights in order to preserve the common society. This balance between individual rights and the preservation of the society described by the constitution is treated in detail by Flathman (1976):

> The practice of rights is based upon and fosters an excessive, egoistic individualism, an individualism that is destructive of the most desireable forms of human relationships--namely those involved in and fostered by a high degree of community (p. 183).

Constitutions, then, are give-and-take documents. They give a right and then they take some of it back.

The procedure here is to describe some rights and to suggest to the reader that rules governing education do the same thing that constitutions do (give-and-take the same rights). The purpose of all this is to allow the reader to form her own opinion as to whether rules governing education operate in the same manner as do constitutions and, if such a conclusion is reached, the reader should consider whether the purpose of constitutions (stated below) and the purpose of rules governing education are the same.

PERSONAL LIBERTY. The physical freedom of the individual. In the larger society, freedom generally, but prison for those dangerous to the community. In the schools, compulsory education but only for part of your life.

RIGHT TO PRIVACY. In the larger society, restrictions on governmental recordkeeping of individual data and an alarming growth of the scope of the information kept. In the schools, the protections of the Family Rights and Privacy Act and the increased individual recordkeeping required by competency based education and other educational reform programs.

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT. In the larger society, general freedom of thought which is limited by society's reluctance to reward radical thinkers. In the schools, educational reform requires uniform competencies (i.e., everyone must "know" the same things) while allowing anyone to think ("know") what he wishes as long as he does not expect to receive a diploma.

EQUALITY. In the larger society, equal rights (not equality). "Men obviously are not equal in intelligence, skill, and background. Men also readily accept inequality in hierarchially organized institutions such as political parties, the armed forces, bureaucracies, industry and educational establishments" (Duchacek, 1973, p.67).

Even educational reform, itself, does not promise equality, only equal educational opportunity.

Duchacek describes other rights which can be shown to appear both in constitutions and in rules governing education and which are a balance between individual rights and benefits to society, but no purpose is served by developing these examples further. The reader now is asked if the similar nature of constitutions and rules governing education at least suggest that the following statement by Duchacek about constitutions might also apply to rules governing education (the footnotes are added):

> The dynamic force behind all constitution making is primarily political... namely who leads whom, with what intent, for what purpose, by what means, and with what restraints. In such matters political leaders are not inclined to allow their legal experts[1] to have the last word. They consider constitutions[2] to be too serious a business to be left to constitutional lawyers[3] alone. Consequently, the task of legal and stylistic experts is to assist the ruling elite when it tries to translate its own ideological commitment and understanding of the nation's[4] purpose, history and political culture into bills of rights, preambles and neatly numbered chapters, articles, and paragraphs[5] which deal with the power, organization, and restraints of public authority[6] The final, finely chiseled product then reflects the way in which the ruling elite desires its national community[7] to be governed for its own good--and for the elite's good (p. 9).

Earlier, I stated that I would suggest that the purpose of educational reform is to continue control by the elite and not to enfranchise the disenfranchised. I have suggested this by a comparison of constitutions and rules governing education. I left the reader to his own conclusions. I also indicated earlier that I would consider the "control by the elite" premise to be a construct rather than a

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1 Replace "legal experts" with "educational experts" and reread.
2 Replace "constitutions" with "rules governing education".
3 Replace "constitutional lawyers" with "educators".
4 Replace "nation's" with "school's".
5 Here we might add "rules governing education".
6 Including public school authority.
7 "School community".

conclusion and to test the validity of the construct by examining current and recent events and research findings (artifacts) to see if the observable phenomena can be explained by the premise.

UNEXPECTED ARTIFACTS

Following are some artifacts presented, for convenience, in five categories. Again, you may draw your own conclusions. I suggest that what we observe is a natural (to be expected) result of educational reform which seeks to continue elitism rather than provide reform:

Artifact 1: Educational Programs That Don't Work or Have Useless Goals for Students:

Robert Frahm (1979) recently completed a tour of many states as a Ford Fellow in Educational Journalism during which he examined educational reform. Margaret Silberberg, a Minneapolis psychologist, told him that although minimum competency testing identifies and assists students who need help, we have no evidence that remediation helps. "Certain remedial programs teach kids to take tests, but as far as enhancing academic skills, they do not work (p. C-1)".

If they do not work, why will the state of Washington spend $94 million for reading and math programs; Michigan $31 million; Florida $26 million; and New Jersey $68 million for remedial programs in one year? Is it possible that this is less costly than real reform would be to the power base of the elite?

Frahm also was told that many competency based programs have such low standards that to be successful in these programs means little in terms of success in life. A Denver senior told him that if you can not pass Denver's test (required for graduation) "you have the IQ of an artichoke (p. C-1)". "Why would reformers, truely interested in aiding the disadvantaged, establish low standards and give those concerned the false sense of security that the education they receive will be useful?

Jacobson (1978) presented a Socratic counselor whose student tells him: "Well, now that I am graduating it seems to me that the skills and knowledge I have acquired are not taken seriously by anyone except more educators" (p. 455).

The New York State Board of Regents is revising its graduation standards upward. Speaking of the current standards, Winsor Lott, director of the Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Educational Testing (BESET!) said: "The problem with survival skills is that they tend to be a rather elementary level of skills" (p. 9). While Lott is stating the obvious, we should still prefer elementary skills that permit one to survive to higher skills which will foreclose any hope of a diploma for many students who have not even mastered the elementary survival skills. That is, this would be our preference if we wanted educational reform to aid the disadvantaged and not protect the holdings of the elite.

While remedial programs which do not work absorb millions of dollars, competency testing programs can achieve the same lack of success for much less money. Cawelti (1978), arguing against HR 9574 (Congressman Mottl's bill to establish a national proficiency test) said that the bill (falsely) "assumes that, given the evidence of nonperformance by students as measured by the tests, the teachers will then be able to do something about it (p. 620)" and that negative effects of testing on minority students would outweigh any possible good.

Nathan (1978) suggested that while the goals of educational reform efforts may be laudatory, the imposition of testing in its usual form causes the program to fail because testing cannot accurately predict survival outside of school.

Wise (1978) said that "Reason and evidence provide little, if any, justification for belief that minimum competency testing will help poor students to learn or poor teachers to teach (598)."

While Cawleti, Nathan and Wise tell us that testing is not only ineffective, but actually damaging to disadvantaged students, Pipho (1979) tells us that 36 states have testing requirements. Why would these states place such emphasis on testing if they really wanted to help the disadvantaged?

Perhaps the most puzzling situation is the continuation of programs for the disadvantaged (ESEA Title I and bilingual education) which do not work. Cooperman (1979) advised a Senate Education Subcommittee that these "programs are ineffective" and should be eliminated (p. 5)". Others have reached the same conclusion through other evaluations of these programs. The continuation of unsuccessful programs would be expected of a society which did not want the programs' clients to change position in the society. Why, then, do we continue them?

Artifact 2: Institutional Bias

Institutional bias has been the subject of many papers and I will not belabor it here except to reflect on the Florida functional literacy examination. Students must pass the test if they wish to receive a regular high school diploma. Disproportionate numbers of black students fail the test and the test is being challenged in court as "biased". If it is not biased against blacks, why do they score differently from whites? Probably because the schools are biased against blacks and the tests reflect this bias. Wherever the bias lies, I wonder why it exists in any governmental program aimed at helping the disadvantaged. The bias would make sense if some elitist group were trying to retain its power.

Artifact 3: Rewarding Failure and Incompetence

Michigan, New Jersey and other states reward failure by providing cash bonuses (compensatory education funds) to those who do not learn. Lincoln Jarrett, budget officer for the Florida Department of Education said the Florida Act which

established the functional literacy test provided $10 million in 1977-78 for those who failed the tests. Districts will get an expanded $26.5 million in 1978-79 (p. 2).

Bracey (1978) decried the current atmosphere which encourages incompetence: "Many people are not incompetent; they simply perform incompetently because there is no reason not to (p. 352)."

Why would a society say it wants those who are educationally disadvantaged to be competent and at the same time reward incompetency?

Artifact 4: Government's Failure to Act Given an Opportunity to do so:

Lerner (1978) argued that recent Supreme Court decisions concerning the use of tests show that to judge a test the Court "needs ...the psychometric equivalent of Gray's Anatomy... a set of standards acceptable to recognized experts in the field of psychometrics regardless of their ...social policy preferences (p. 916)." The Court is moving away from reliance upon federal agency guidelines which are "a political compromise between competing social values (p. 916)". Lerner is telling us that government agencies have the opportunity to provide testing guidelines which are above politics but do not do so. What "social values" are reflected in these guidelines? Perhaps the values of those who control the government agencies.

The Bakke decision is the most recent example of government having an opportunity to take a giant step forward in opening up opportunities to the disenfranchised but deciding instead to take an "ambiguous" position, according to Hazard (1978). What was the majority's rationale for requiring that the Davis Medical School's admission policy be changed? The Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. Recall

Duchacek's analysis of the purpose of a constitution presented above.

Artifact 5: Reluctance to Give Anything Away

If education is a realistic way to help the disadvantaged to an equal share of the American pie and if we really want to do this, we should make education as politically powerful as we can and support it with as much money as we can.

Congressional critics of the suggested Federal Department of Education said that centralization of education in one department would make it easier for the person at the top to make radical changes in policy, and "Somewhere along the line, you are going to have an activist secretary (Roth, p. 295)" These critics seem reluctant to give away their power. But these are Congressmen, not educators. Educators could see the value to the disadvantaged of a strong cabinet-level education department: Education Daily, January 18, 1979, p. 1: "The main opposition to a department of education continues to come from the American Federation of Teachers."

Proposition 13. Jesse Jackson (1978) said "The future is going to cost. Educating, employing and making people productive is going to cost. But leaving people ignorant, unemployed, dependent and destructive is going to cost more (p. 19)". Jackson is right. Proposition 13 is not cost effective, but people are reluctant to give away what they have.

CONCLUSION

This is a paper of suggestions, not empirically tested conclusions. It is possible that the goals of some educational reform programs are less than altruistic. (Perhaps more than possible, given the analysis presented here). But painting with a broad brush is unfair. I am more comfortable in saying that

some educational programs may be designed to maintain current societal relationships than I am in saying that all educational reform is a nefarious plot of the elitists. Some people, however, do not openly consider the possibility that educational reform may not be in the best interests of some students. It is hoped that this paper will result in educators' washing educational reform proposals in the acid bath of cynicism.

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